

Title

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Description

This was a general conversation about the Muslim community in Ghana and its internal structures; the nature of traditional leadership and how it is evaluated by the western educated Muslims. We also touched on the issue of inter-religious tolerance in Ghana and the reasons for such a high degree of accommodation.

Recorder ID: 001-A-002-OADavid.....2005-07-20. Length of interview 55:12

July 20 2005 University of Ghana, Mr. Mumuni Sulimana, Senior Lecturer of Religious Studies--teaching courses Quran, Hadith, Contemporary Islam in Ghana and Africa. His research interests are in Islam and Politics, Islamic education, and Muslim Non-Governmental organization (NGOs)

Topic: Islam and Tolerance in Ghana.

Interview following the introduction of the interviewee.

Q. Do you perceive the Muslims and the Muslim Community of Ghana as tolerable (Muslim-Muslim relations and Muslim-non-Muslim relations)?

A. Generally our followers share the view that Muslims are not tolerant among themselves. What I mean is that we have different doctrinal groups as far as Islamic in Ghana is concerned. In more cases we realize that each group takes its views to be absolute and finds it difficult to listen to the other side and this manifested in intra-Islamic conflict as it was the case in the late 1990s --the case of conflict between the Ahl-Sunni (radical vs. conservative Sufi oriented Tijanniya) on minor issues that could have been resolved. For example, the conflict over the "Maulite" religious celebrations or even over burial and fundamental spiritual issues-- these are issues that must be discussed and not lead to conflict. BUT on the other side, however, I will say that Muslims as a group are very, very tolerant to other religious traditions in this country. That is so because it seems Muslims have so much confidence in their religion and they think their religion is absolutely satisfying so in some cases they do not seem to worry about competition as far as their religion is concerned. You realize that Ghana is predominantly Christian; you see the [competition among the Christian groups] Evangelistic outreach programs, social developments and competitions that the Muslims seem not to care [or worried about]. I believe they have the ultimate trust that the Quran chapter 15 verse 9 says that "God will defend His Religion" and therefore they think that no matter what the other religious traditions do [Christian denominations do] their religion will still stay focused and therefore no to worry. And on this, I will say that they are more in tune [in

agreement and get along] with the historic churches or orthodox churches. In few cases, there have been problems between Muslims and some Christian Charismatic/Pentecostal churches. Normally, the problem comes from the side of the Christians because you know the Charismatic people think that they have monopoly of spirituality and they make fun [disrespectfully make jokes] in condemning and attacking [Islam] in their preaching and outreach programs. They even attack the other traditional churches and Islam [too]. So in some cases there are problem [of intolerance in Ghana]. I will give you an example of [those who claim to be] Converted Muslim Christian Ministry. And this is a group of people who claim to be Muslims and have now become Christians and anywhere they go they would want to indicate that there is no spirituality in Islam and Islam is empty to the extent of debasing the Quran. They bring the Quran and put it on the ground and step on it and their activities were very strong in Sekondi [in the Western region] and Kumase [in the Ashanti Region] and this brought about inter-religious conflicts between Christian and Muslims in Ghana. This shows that anytime there is conflict in Ghana among religions, the conflict is NOT between Muslims and the mainline [historic orthodox churches]. More often than not [the conflict] is between the Charismatic/Pentecostal movements and the Muslim community. On that score, I am not being objective, but I think that the problem comes from the provocative preaching of the Christians. I will give you [another] example. [The case of Muslims at the Kejetia (car station and trading market) where Muslims made a make-shift mosque [spread their mat to pray at prayer time]. Then came this Christian group and anytime the Muslims [rose, sat, bowed their heads in prayers] the Christians imitated them and insulted them as wasting their time [in worship]. So by the time the Muslims finished praying, the group that was teasing the praying Muslims had run away. Unfortunately, the Muslims [now angry] rushed on a rampage and destroyed chairs and things. The issue here is that the provocation from the Christian side. But what appeared to be intolerance was demonstrated by the Muslims and they even went beyond the level of provocation [in their destructions]. This is a classical example of Muslims/Charismatic Christian conflict. Another example happened in Takoradi in the same way.

Then let us talk about Muslims and the African Traditional culture. You realize in Ghana, particularly in Accra, there is the period known as the no-noise making [during the annual Homowo festival of the traditional people of Accra, the Ga]. This no-noise making custom is enforced by the Traditional authorities. This is the case the month before this annual festival. As far as the Muslim "Zongos" communities in Accra and in the Southern sector of the country is concerned, they have never had any problem with this traditional rule or custom regarding this "no-noise making" rule of the traditional worship. But every year, it has become almost a ritual of violence between the Charismatic churches and the Pentecostal churches and the traditional Religious peoples of [Accra]. If you are interested in the History of Islam in Accra, most people will date it to about 1850 and since 1850 the leadership of the Muslims community have had a perfect, harmoniously relations with the leaders [and people] of the Ga [Accra] traditional areas and there is yet to be any serious, or violent conflict between the two communities. In short, this means that to a larger extend, as far as inter-religious relations are concerns, Muslims [in Ghana have proven to be] a bit more tolerant compared to other faiths.

Q. Your presentation brings to the front the level of tolerance among the main religious groups in the country--the Muslims, the Traditional Authorities [African Traditional Religions], and the main Christian orthodox denomination, EXCEPT the Charismatic/Pentecostal Evangelists who see Islam and even traditional customs as something to be confronted. So this is not a Muslim problems but a Christian problem that needs to be redressed. The second issue is the intra-Muslim conflict on theological interpretations. Let me pick the second one first--the intra-Muslim conflict. If you read John Hunwick's work--Professor Hunwick who did work on the history of Islam in West Africa--he once made the observation that the Muslims in West Africa, especially in Ghana and less so in Nigeria, have not been participants in so far as the intellectual and theological discussions of Islam are concerned therefore they have become followers of Islamic ideas and interpretations that come from the Middle East. Would you [therefore] attribute the intra-Muslims disagreement--that is the conflict within the Muslim community over theological conflicts to these Muslims following what develops in the Middle East or have they themselves over time come to certain conclusions that they can interpret the Quran, the hadith and the practices of Islam on their own and therefore the disagreements are the result of their own interpretations?

A. I think I will start from the teachings of the exceptions. You realize that what is missing in the he nature of Islam in Ghana or in the Volta Basin is that there has never been any radical [jihadist] Islamization. You see all the jihads [in West African Islamic history] were not linked to the Volta Basin, so you come to see, [if we] take Northern Nigeria and parts of Mali there has been [history of jihad] and you therefore realize that one characteristic of jihad is that it make intellectual activities to triumph. Most scholar [of Islam in West Africa] will agree that [those who led the jihad in Northern Nigeria such as] Uthman dan Fodio and his brother Abduala, and Muhammad Bello in fact began a new intellectual movement in the Hausa States [where the jihad took place and this intellectual tradition0 has stood the test of time. That is why you come to see that the Hausa States had their own internal Islamic position on issues that are at times different from the Middle Eastern positions. Unfortunately, in the Volta Basin of Ghana, we have not had that radical history so there is yet to be found a serious intellectual movement to be found from the Volta Basin of which Ghana is a part. We can say that initially [pre-independent era], the Hausa States were the centers of learning for Ghanaian Muslims. So obviously they will come back with views already expressed in the Hausa-Northern Nigeria region and they just implemented them at home. After political independence (post-1957), when Ghana developed intimate relationship with the Arab world a new movement or chapter was drawn. Ghana students received scholarships to study in the Arab world. So you saw Ghanaian students initially going to Egypt, then later on some went to Saudi Arabic, and now you can name any Middle Eastern country and we will have Ghanaian students studying there. One issue I have realized with Ghanaians studying abroad, especially in the Middle East, is that they are not critical about Islamic issues they study [they take it wholly without assessing how relevant it might apply to their local conditions]. So when they come back home, they try to implement their observations and analysis without seeing the peculiar Ghanaian Islamic environment. So you can see a Ghanaian Sufi Muslim [going overseas] and they come back as Shiite, they come back Wahabi, they come back Ahl-Sunni but their problems is that they have not

managed to reconcile their new Ahl-Sunni teachings with their local Islamic understandings prior to their departure overseas. So when they come back, they want to totally discount what they used to think. [Think of another problems associated with this blind imitation] when you take into account the four Islamic schools of law that has historically been associated with different Islamic countries. Ghana, predominantly due to the Almoravid influence, is Malikki [in Islamic legal thought]. The Saudis are Hanbali. So to start with, Ghanaian students who leave Ghana to study in Saudi Arabia have to leave behind the Malikki School because they are going to be taught and learn to practice Islam from the Hanbalist school of thought. Now, when such student comes home, instead now reorienting his mind back to the fact that Ghana does not practice the Hanbali School, [these students come back to preach Islam according to the Hanbali ways. Because of this, the natural differences between the Malikki and Hanbali schools of thought become the Ghana doctrinal problem as far as Ghana is concerned--[hence the intra-Muslim conflict]. But with a comprehensive education it would have been understood that Malikki is orthodox and Hanbali is orthodox [and therefore not to be a source of conflict]. There is also the problem that when these students go there [Arab world to study] they pick up certain interpretation of Islam and come to think that these are the only interpretations of Islam so they will not accommodate any other contrasting view. So when they come back [this come to reflect in the nature of the conflict]. My analysis is that I am yet to find a student who has studied under the Saudi system and comes be to be critical about the Hanbali and the Wahabi intellectual discourse because he just [assimilated such thoughts]. When a student goes to Iran, he comes back with Shiite influences and he is not even critical of the Shiite thoughts and he cannot even think that before these influences he was a non-Shiite; and he cannot do a comparative analysis and see where there is convergence and where there is differences and for that matter raise questions; and when somebody goes to Pakistan he returns with peculiar influences as well. So in the end these Muslims are fighting among themselves just because of inherited [theological differences]. This leads to stagnation of the Muslim society because we seen people being pushed to become Ahl-Sunnah, or Shiite, [pr others] and when on started a school with one student [to teach a school of though] and now he has hundred students, he claims that we have made progress. But where are they drawing their strength from? It is from the same Muslim community and they do not expand. Beside that, they have failed to introduce intellectual discourse to iron out the common issues that cause controversy. So everybody champions his course and in the end we do not have what I will call the Ghanaian position.

Q. Will that then make [Professor] John Hunwick not be right to say that the Ghanaian community is really not grounded to the extend that people can absorb the different interpretations or schools of interpretations effectively.

A. In that sense, Hunwick is right. But I started by saying that there are few exception and I will give just 2 exceptions. If you read the work of Hajj Umar of Kete Krachi, I will say that to a large extend, he was a purely Ghanaian Islam scholar who had his own interpretation of Islamic issues. He was not tremendously influenced by the external Islamic views; and I will give you his own works and he [talked] about the encounters with Europeans and the History of the Gonja, and he was able to use his own

understanding of Islam to forecast as far as the future development of this country was concerns. If you look at his poems, they were based on Ghanaian issues. Contemporary, there are movements or attempts to unify Muslims and have a Muslim agenda, if we might. I can give you one or two basic developments. One is the Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Ghana and they are more into empowering the Muslim women, educating women, and bringing all Muslims women of all doctrinal positions onto a common platform and for that matter to ask themselves of how they can champion themselves on spiritual, social, and economic developments. So in that wise they are coming out with a Ghanaian perspective on how a Muslim woman should live. The second one is a new movement that calls itself the Coalition of Muslim Associations of Ghana and they are attacking the issue of leadership critically. They think that one of the basic problems facing Muslims in the country is that they don't have a visionary and effective leadership structure that has the interest of the Muslim community at heart. So the [old leaders] are pursuing their own [narrow] interests and that stagnates the interests of Islam. [Furthermore] they have come to realize that though Islam is part and parcel of the Ghanaian society, but Islam is not making any inroads to the governance of this country. So there is a need for Muslims in the governance of this country and it means that Muslims should participate in secular issues and the state should know the views of Muslims. It has not been easy but as of now, at least all the major stakeholders come together in deliberations on issues affecting Muslims.

Two issues as examples I will give very quickly--1) the reaction of the Muslim community toward the 2000 Population Census. It was not a parochial sectional response; the responses was by Muslims towards that they were under-represented [or under counted in the census] and they came to [protest] in very strong terms ; 2) the second was about the government handling of the hajj [pilgrimage]. Their response to the 2005 Hajj. The problem has been that [the organization of the hajj has been politicized] as far as Ghana is concerned. So now the Muslim community in a national conference on Hajj came out to critique the government and the way they have [managed] the Hajj and [the conference] came out with a national report on Hajj and made suggestions and recommendation on Hajj so as to take another look and to focus on the religious aspect of it and leave politics out of it, and they recommended that government should have a minimal involvement in it.

3) The third issue is individual [reflection on individual Muslim position on Islam. The case of Hajj Umar of Kete Krachi is already stated]. The next [individual example I want to mention is that of] Alhajj Umar of the Ahl-Sunnah group. Alhajj Umar [of the Ahl-Sunnah] though a Saudi trained but I believe that he is beginning a new person interpretation of Islamic law and for that matter is not wholly following the Saudi interpretation as far as Islam in contemporary society is concerned. He happened to visit the US (United States of America) last year during the Ramadan period-moving from one Muslim community in the US to the other. And when he back one of the popular statements he has been making is that "though he studies in Medina {Saudi Arabia} for over 38 years, but Islam is more seriously pursued in the United States than in the Arab world." And now, you can say that he is appreciating the development of Islam in the United States. And he thinks that the Saudi position is dogmatic and hypocritical and do

not even seem to have a [true] Islamic agenda. Now you come to see that there are many issues in [this] country that he holds a different view and he does this from his own analytical point of view. Almost anytime he has the opportunity [to speak in public] he criticizes [Muslim] men. He thinks that Muslim men are irresponsible, they don't understand the [concept] of polygamy as preached by Islam, they create more problems for the women, and that is why they have overburdened women and polygamy should be really be re-examined critically. He is not saying that polygamy is bad, but [he is arguing for the enforcement] of the Islamic theological position as far as the operation of polygamy is concerned. He says that we are approaching it from our traditional perspective and creating more problems. He says that if you [travel] by the Kanda Highway all the street boys you see there are Muslims and he believes that this [over flow of street boys] is due to the irresponsible of men. I'm raising these issues because normally Muslim preacher will talk about women, they have to be submissive, and they have to obey their husbands. They don't talk about the lapses of men and he finds this very critical and Muslim community is not happy about [what he says]. To me, [I see] things changing gradually and I believe that with time the efforts of these independent thinkers will give a national Ghanaian interpretation of Islamic Law.

4) The last issue I will raise is about September 11 [2001]. When September 11 came, for once the majority of Ghanaian Muslims were against what happened what happened and they thought that what happened was not Islam. They thought that violence in that perspective was not champion the cause of Islam and for that matter they thought that Muslims should be critical [of such actions]. I can go into how Alhaji Umar was against it and [spoke against it and] thought that [the] people [who were engaged in September 11] did not understand [Islam]. [He is therefore enlighten[ing] people on matters of Islam]. But [I will say that] Hunwick's statement that the general atmosphere seem to be following the interpretations of other [in the Middle East is the case]. But there is another individual thinker that we can follow to see that he is creating a different [Islamic thought for himself] and that is Captain Rashid of Tamale [in the Northern Region]. Now he has what he calls the Islamic Cultural Clinic. He is using spirituality in the practical way. He is combining Islamic spirituality with herbal treatment and most of the people who have visited him and had interaction with him [see him as] solving some of the physical healing problems as far as certain diseases are concerned, and I believe that he is also becoming an independent thinker on Islam. Most [Muslims] have problems with him because he is trying to emphasis on the Quranic interpretations or injunctions--for example on ablution--he thinks that the Quran say you should wash you hands and alms and your feet. He thinks this to be the most important things [regarding] ablution while most people will think that you cannot practice Islam very well without the Sunnah or examples of the prophet. For him [Rashid] the emphasis on the Quran is his priority [as opposed to the hadith] as he tries to elevate the society problems of Muslims in this country. He has also began writing and I think that he now has about 5 books. He is a serious Sufi and he defending the Sufi cause not only verbally but also in writing just as Alhaji Umar of Kete Krachi did. So I think that he is becoming an independent thinker and he analyzes situations before he speaks. That is why in Tamale [at the moment] there is controversy between him and some of the Mallams [local scholars]. I hear that last year at the Ramadan, he had a lot of problems with the Ibrahim Bashar and there were some debates about issues and I believe that if these things are given the natural cause in

the end people will come to see that we do not just have to follow scholars. We have to be convinced about what they say and I think that this to be the basic problem in Islam--globally and in Ghana as well because we follow our scholars without being critical about what they say.

Q. You have touch on a number of very good issues here. There is a trend in Ghana where certain individual Muslims are thinking independently and transforming the conversation in Ghana regarding Islam. You therefore have a forum at least to develop [Ghanaian positions without looking] to the Middle East for guidance. The second issue of importance is the [development of a] Coalition of Muslim Associations which sees a lack of leadership [in the Ghanaian Muslim community, notwithstanding those] individual who are emerging as critical [problem] for [the Muslims community]. [Regarding the lack of leadership, are you pointing figures at] the traditional leaders of the Muslim [for not leading?] And how [does the emerging leaders operate without] infringing on the authority of the old leadership?

A. I think that there are three basic leadership structures in so far as Islam in Ghana is concerned. 1) The first leadership structure is what we refer to as the Office of the National Chief Imam. Loosely, it is supposed to be an association of the imams of this country. It is alleged that he is linked up to all the regional imams and therefore they are the spiritual leaders of the Muslims community. More often than not, they are seen to be the overall leaders of [Muslims in this country] but I will limit them to spiritual leadership. Secondly, they are nurturing the leadership of the Sufi traditions. So the National Chief Imam for example is a Tijaniyya and for that matter the Sufi traditional leadership has now culminated into the national leadership. 2) We have also the Council of Muslim Chiefs. These are the Ethnic Headmen who are alleged to be tremendously influenced by Islam. Thus, instead of calling themselves Ethnic Heads, they call themselves Muslim leaders. You know that [among the] Zongo community, we have two groups of peoples. We have the national immigrants [those who migrated from various parts of the country into the urban Muslims community] and the West African immigrants [who migrated from other parts of West Africa into the urban centers in Ghana]. The West African immigrants may have come from the Francophone countries or the British [colonies] but basically from Nigeria. All these [ethnic groups] have interface with Islam. The Hausa, the Yoruba, the Fulani--so their tribal heads call themselves Muslim leaders. So now there is an association [to which all these leaders associate which they called the] Council of Muslim Chiefs. They in a way [have influence in the picking of imams], they control the Imams and because of that they have become patrons of the Office of the National Imam. It is now their prerogative to designate the National Imam. Though the reason for their leadership was not based on their scholarship in Islam. [Of course, some of them could be] Islamic scholars. But now after using their tribal [affiliations to become leaders] they are now the supervisors of the spiritual, social, and economic activities of Muslims. So now they are the king-makers of the Ulama or Imams as far as Ghana is concerned. 3) The third is that over the years, Muslims have decided secularly to have leadership--this is what I refer to as the Islamic Councils. The first [such secular Islamic Council was] during the First Republic [1957-1966]. Beginning about 1953, this was called the Muslim Council and later on it became

the Ghana Muslim Representative Council during the 1970s. In the PNDC days (1980s), it became the Federation of Muslim Councils. So from the First republic through the Fourth Republic there has been a secular [Muslims] council. That secular council [claims] to be the mouth piece of the Muslims in this country in matters of politics (and in relations with national leaders in political matters). So whenever there is supposed to be reaction from the Muslim community [on political issues, that reaction] does not come from the Office of the National Imam. Rather it comes from the Office of the federation of the Ghana Muslim Councils. These are the three structures of the leadership of the Muslims in this country. But go back to the [Federation] of Muslim Councils, for example, one point is clear that their origin and their formation has always been manipulated by politicians or a particular government. The first was that the Ghana Muslim Council. It was [manipulated by Ghana's first president who encouraged its formation as a way to have] a stake in the Muslim community. That is why people like Imoro Egala who were CPP party activists became leaders of that Muslim [secular organization]. When [the association became] the Ghana Muslim representative Council, [it was the time when] Akyeampong took power [in the 1970s through military coup and his called to Muslims] was that he wanted to unite the Muslims and set a committee to talk to the Muslims. In the end, A Muslims representative Council came into existence. When Rawlings also make his coup [in the 1980s] and in his intimate relations with Brother Kaddafi [of Libya] so Kaddafi came here and invited Muslims to Libya to come to talk about Unity and in the end we have the Federation of Ghana Muslim Councils. So Kaddafi had a hand and Rawlings had a hand in the formation of the Federation of the Ghana Muslim Councils. So they [secular Muslim Councils] have not been independent as far as government programs and government initiatives are concerned. This is critical because the have not been independent but rather support the [government of the day]. So it becomes difficult for Muslims to make an independent and critical because they always support government initiatives. The worse of it was the GMRC (Ghana Muslim Representative Council) when Akyeampong decided to introduce the UNIGOV program [a program that was unconstitutionally introducing a military cum civilian administration in Ghana]. The [secular Muslim organizations] were the champions of the idea and using the Quran to support party politics--this is not even to talk about the SMC and the Rawlings era. [Thus] in some circles there are those who say that the Office of the National Imam and the Federation of Muslim Councils were seen to be the Religious Wing of the Rawlings Government, and now when the NDC lost power, they have shifted to the NPP [government in power].

We know that religious leaders should seek harmony with political leaders and this has been the issue [how do you seek such harmony?] The Coalition of Muslim Organizations was an attempt by some Muslim activists in Ghana to out with a leadership structure devoid of government influence and in bringing everybody on board so that we can say this is our [type of] Christian Council [or Muslim Council] so that when there is any issue and this Council came on board the doctrinal, and the traditional [Muslim positions or divisions] would not become important. If this had succeeded, it would have changed the Muslim leadership structure in this country--so that Muslims would have a forum to discuss issues that affects them and for that matter the issues affecting the State. For now, however, the basis problem of the Coalition [of Muslim Organizations] is the Office of

the National Chief Imam. The reason being that the Office [of the National Chief Imam] is too suspicious about the activities and they also think that [the Coalition] is a radical group that wants to [strategically] usurp the traditional powers of the Muslim leadership.

Q. But [the Coalition membership] is also Western Educated?

A. That is the second point. Because the [Traditional leadership of the Muslim community] brand us [the Coalition] as educated university lecturers who now want to dabble in the affairs of Muslims and usurp power from them. This is a negative critique of the movement. But you raise the question about the leadership [of the Coalition], but to be sincerely with you, the leadership [of the Coalition] are just people who have high western education but also Islamic education. And now I think the traditional leadership has realized that this leadership has all that it takes to speak for Islam. The [new educated Muslims of the Coalition] have the Arabic education, they have the Islamic education, and they have the secular education so if they are allowed, then naturally they can sustain the leadership of the Muslim community and realistically replace those of the [traditional elite]. One thing you must realize is that the Muslim community is not as organized as the Christian community and therefore the leaders are the disorganization to satisfy their own parochial interests. So now if there is a serious well-organized leadership structure [to emerge], some [of these old leaders] would lose their daily bread and for that matter [the issues] are issues of the survival of the fittest.

Q. Let me redirect the question here. When you look at Islam in the context of religious tolerance, on the material available in our conversation—possibly the disorganized nature of the Muslim leadership, [Muslim] long history of settlement based on ethnic divisions and therefore Muslim ethnic leadership has [created a situation] where Muslims tolerate each other because there is a clear understanding of which group is which [in terms of identification]. The associations that the government help [create] or support has also brought the Muslims into the political system or at least [helped them develop relations with political leaders] and therefore they have worked with governments hence we have peace and harmony in the country. Would a Coalition of Muslim Associations of a western educated and religiously educated and very well endowed religiously create a situation whereby they challenge a government or challenge the traditional Muslim leaders in such a way as to lead to conflict?

A. I think that you can never trust politicians and you also never trust the current leadership of the Muslim community. But what I believe that the Coalition of Muslim Association is trying to do is not necessarily or deliberately to challenge the government in power. They want to harness the material and resources of the Muslim community together and see how to create an Islamic agenda for the development of the Muslim community. They have identified education [as a topic of concern].

You realize that Islamic secular education was the first [type of] formal education system in Ghana before even the missionaries and before the Ghana Education Service. But up till now, Islamic education [that we call the Makaranta system] has not even harmonized its operations. It is still fragmented and still being owned by individuals and there are no

stages [or structures] in pursuing Islamic education in Ghana. For instance we do not have the basic primary [education structure for Islam education]. We don't have the senior primary and [so that] a child from the Islamic system can know that you finish [at] this stage and you can go to the next stage... If the Makaranta system [claims] to be able to provide for the spiritual and social development of the child [then it has not done so for the material needs of education. Because of the lack of formalization of the structure of Islamic education] we were thinking that it was about time that Muslims sat down to discuss [such issues. How many Makaranta systems are necessary, the number of teacher to student ratio. We can formalize the system and organize them into different grades] so that there could be a comprehensive Islamic educational system that runs parallel to the secular system. You see that Northern Nigeria is able to organize its Makaranta system along this way. These are issues or challenges that the Coalition is interested in. Secondly, you come to see that the Government is trying to secularize the Makaranta/Madrassa system through the Islamic Education Unit. Now, even educating the proprietors of the Arabic/ Makaranta system to understand this process. Now they think that the Government is trying to own [or take over] their schools so they are resisting to be part and parcel of this good and noble initiative. The Coalition of Muslim Associations would like to intervene to explain to the people of the rationale [behind the Government policy]. You see that the Islamic Education Unit is supposed to be wholly funded by the [Muslim community]. But they see it as a government outfit and therefore should be left to the government—hence the series of problems as opposed to the Catholic Educational Unit, the Methodist Educational Unit. The [Christian Education Units are] funding everything—[by their denominations—the] Catholics, the Presbyterians, and even our brothers the Ahmadiyya [Muslims] have an Ahmadiyya Education Unit but ours is perceived as a government [enterprise].

Q. I talked to the Anglican Archbishop of West Africa yesterday and he made me clearly understand that secondary schools run by the Churches when the government takes over, it takes over fully, but the primary schools and JSS [Junior Secondary Schools] are the responsibilities of the local Christian and religious communities. Why hasn't the Islamic Education Unit Managers made an effort through the Coalition of Muslim Associations to create a front thereby putting out a national agenda to educate the national Imam and the Council of Imams or the individuals who can mobilize the traditional [Muslim] community to support [secular education]?

A. I have given the first issue [regarding] the misconception of the Muslims that the Islamic Education Unit is a government agency. But now, there is the Islamic Education Unit is trying [to do] what you have just suggested. But the first problem confronting them was their offices. You realize the Central Mosque at Abossey Okai has a very big track of land to it. So the Islamic Educational Unit, [...] at a stakeholders meeting brought the chiefs, proprietors, and everybody and it was decided that we are pleading with them to release the track of land [at the mosque] so that we can have our own [Islamic educational Unit] offices [next to the central Mosque] and from here we can [engage in other developments]. The issue went to the Office of the National Chief Imam and finally a group of Muslims calling themselves "Accra Caucus" claimed that the land is for them and they were not going to give it to the Islamic Educational Unit. So these are some of

the obstacles. When Rashid Bawa was Minister of State and Education, there was an effort to come out with a five year development plan for Islamic Education Unit. A committee was put in place in which the Muslim committee was involved so that we can come out with a strategic plan. The chairman of the committee was the late Professor Abdulla Botchwey. Alhaji Gbandamoshi and all the stakeholders were part of this committee, and Dr. Sulley Gariba of Tamale was also involved. Unfortunately, Rashid Bawa has lost his parliamentary seat, he has lost his political [clout] and I do not know how far that initiative is going. But what I want to say is that initiatives have started coming [out from sectors of the community] to really put the Islamic Education on the Muslim agenda so that from there, a lot of education will go on to make Muslims own it and develop their own educational institutions.

Q. And this will certainly contribute to national integrations since the schools are public.

A. Let me conclude that the Coalition of Muslim Organizations is not to create confusion or division as far as national leadership is concerned. If the Muslims had understood their role, then we can start from here. But there [remains] the problem of their understanding the mission of the Coalition. The next problem with the Coalition is with politicians. This is in the sense that [politicians] seem to be comfortable with the status quo of the Muslim leadership as it is now—[as a result, politicians do not try to have anything to do with the Coalition]. The best example I can give on this is [with regard] to the national conference on Hajj. [We] were supposed to have the president [of Ghana] as a guest speaker, the vice-president was informed, and the Greater Accra Regional Minister was informed. We did all these negotiations through the Chief of Staff. We had even written a speech for the President and the Chief of Staff kept on assuring us that there was no problem [regarding the president's attendance]. Then 3 days to the conference, he said "oh the President might not come, but he will send a delegate". That was fine, but on that day of the conference, nobody from the government came. And when the Chief of Staff was called, according to him, he called [to find out more about us from a source] that said he did not know about us. According to him [the Chief of Staff] he had also contacted the Office of the National Chief Imam and the Chief Imam also claimed that he did not do anything about this [the conference]. That is why no one from the government came. Meanwhile, the Opposition Parliamentarians were there [at the conference] and they used it to their own advantage. So in the end, the government was forced to make statements as to why they could not come. So the whole thing was politicized. The issue then is how can you even trust the politicians?

[Furthermore] before the 2004 elections, there were always issues [raised about] Muslims and elections—that [Muslims] are violent during elections. The issue was that any person who wanted to do some negative politicking will go to Nima or Zongo [the Muslim settlements] and take people and they go [carry out] the violence. What the Coalition [of Muslim Organizations] did was to educate the Zongo community [let them know that they] need not to allow or to be misused by others to achieve their own political agenda. If somebody come to give you 5,000 or 10,000 [cedis] then you go engage in violence that can [cause you your life] when he become an MP or President and you have nothing. So [we want to educate them to] begin an active role as far as

politics is concerned. The [next] thing the Coalition did was that a lot of seminars were organized at Teachers' Hall targeting Muslim leaders [the Ulama` of] the need to explain [Muslims] at the mosque why [it was important for them] to register and to let them know that [nobody can promise them citizenship as a vote promise] and to let them know that they [the Muslims] are not aliens. [Some politicians have made the people at] the Zongo community think that [Muslims] are aliens and that if they do not follow the political party in power and an opposition party came into power [like it was in 1969 when many Nigerians were deported, they too] will be deported. We let them know that "you are Ghanaians, register, and vote."

The third issue [is that in addition to our communications with the Muslim community, we now concentrated on the political parties]. At that time [2004 elections] the main political parties were the NPP, NDC, the PND, and the Grand Coalition of the CPP. So first we went to Atta Mills [NDC presidential candidate of the 2004 election] and talked to him about the need to honor Muslims in his party with political positions. [One of the major issues of that] elections was about [how the presidential candidates selected their] running mates. So when you are considering your running-mates, then Muslims in your party who have the qualification should be [seriously considered] so that it will harmonize the religious divide. This religious divide is also a regional divide. So if you have a Northerner who is a Muslims, then that person bridges the North-South divide as well as the Muslim-Christianity divide. We went to the [other political parties and made the same request]. The issue was not to take any particular political party to deal with, but to explaining the next would-be government that when you have power, please be broad in your outlook and know that [in this country] there are Christians and there are Muslims and I believe that they appreciated it and the mass media projected it too. This I believe that if [Muslims continue to do things this way] then it means they too will be in harmony with politicians so that in cases where politicians are not on the right track, they will be more comfortable to comment upon, the critique, and suggest.

You know it will take time for politicians to come to terms with this. But [members of the Coalition] are intellectuals and they have good professions and so people may also think that [their lobbying effort] is a way for them to carving a niche in the politics of this country for themselves and so there is suspicion all over, but I think the intention of this group [The Coalition of Muslim Associations] is just to [provide for] a Muslim agenda for the country.

Closing observations: There is nothing wrong about setting a Muslim agenda since Ghana has the law that you do not establish a political party on religious and ethnic lines, so it appropriate for the nation that Muslims and other groups or constituencies are represented fairly within the political parties. And this will be consistent with what some of the leading Christian churches try to find/establish Christian-Muslim Relation Offices [by which they can] will work peacefully. In a sense then, the transformation of the political system in our own historical development contributes to inter-religious harmony. Of course the crisis in the religious is indeed crisis of discussions [discourse] within the individual religions and not against others religions. I thank you very much for your time this morning.

Response of Interviewee: I must add that I speak [to you as part of the Coalition] to which I am the first vice president.

Thanks you. End of interview